ALAS, CLAY GEERDES! I KNEW HIM WELL!
YES, HE USED TO PUBLISH A LI'L SPLEEN-VENTING NEWSLETTER CALLED COMIX WAVE!
CULTURE VULTURES ©1992 ROBERTS & SIERGEY

CLAY GEERDES' COMIX WAVE 118 © 1992. P. O. Box 7094, Berkeley, CA 94707. World Rights Reserved. Artwork and quoted material herein © the artists concerned. Used here for promotional purposes only. $9 for the next twelve issues. Set of back issues $ 40 postpaid.

I got a pair of **Jim Siergey's Culture Vultures** and I have them sitting near the piano when I practice my sonatas. Great little characters. I recommend you give them as gifts to all your intellectual friends. See the ad on this page for details. -Clay

Robert Pasternak: The Imagery of his Work, a unique little 5x7" folio is $4.95 from him at 291 Rupertsland Ave., Wpg., Man., Canada R2V OG5.

I got a press release from Rip Off Press saying they are breaking with their underground image in '92. I hate to say this but the underground companies haven't been in the avant garde of outrageousness since the late seventies. One serious problem I've been aware of is the closed door underground companies presented to freelance cartoonists. Instead of expanding and welcoming new talent, most of the underground companies either ignored anyone outside the company clique or rejected them for eclectic aesthetic reasons. Robert Crumb originally said he wanted **Zap** to be an open door to experimental cartoonists, but by the third issue that door had closed. Rip Off Press was always a closed group consisting of Gilbert Shelton and his friends from the University of Texas in Austin, but Shelton quickly tired of doing all the drawing board chores himself and soon had Dave Sheridan and others helping him. Of the majors, Ron Turner was probably the only one open to new cartoonists circa 1971-2 and his All New Underground Comix series proved a financial bust. When the Head Shop network went belly up in the early seventies, underground comix reverted to dependency upon mail order and specialty comic book stores and since most of the comic book stores outside the major urban areas made very little money on undergrounds in comparison with the legal trouble they had with them it was not long before underground comix were mainly a mail order item.

Rip Off Press survived through sales of Shelton's Freak Brothers comix. The Print Mint gave up and went back to posters and **Zap** went to Last Gasp, but comix sales did not sustain Ron Turner's company and he diversified into book production. Comix did not keep Krupp alive either. Denis Kitchen turned to nostalgic reprints of the work of artists like Wil Eisner, Al Capp, Milton Caniff, and Ernie Bushmiller to keep his company in the black. Nor could straight comix keep a company like Fantagraphics afloat. Gary Groth began publishing pornographic comics under the Eros logo in the eighties.

As 1992 commences, the comic book business, like other enterprises in what is for many people a serious depression, is likely to take some hard licks. Few people can afford the inflated prices on the new books. I think video is taking a bite out of all print-oriented businesses and, let's face it, there are way too many comic books on the shelves. A lot of companies are going down the tubes very soon just as they did at the end of the forties. Disney just found out that parents have their limits where high-priced comic books are concerned and I suspect the scales are about to fall from the eyes of some of the other fledgling companies.

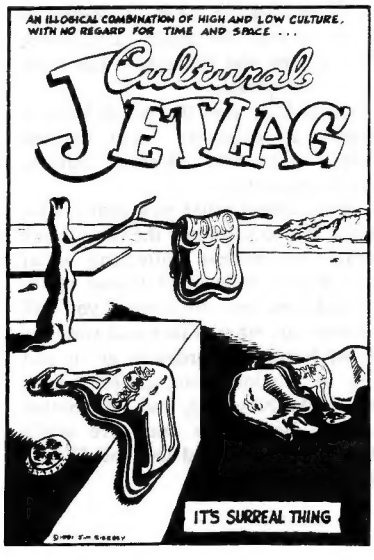
It's all right to produce comics purely for collectors, but in order to do this it is necessary to turn the majority of the buyers into collectors. To do so is to say goodbye to the casual reader.

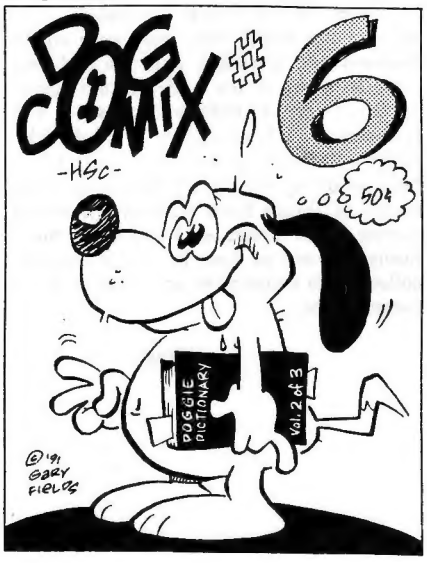
Selling comic books is a tricky business. Each generation is programmed to hate what the last generation loved. Why? To increase sales and prevent hand-me-downs? If the children of sixties hippies loved the comix their parents read, they wouldn't have to go out and buy any new ones. TV has proven very successful at selling artificial rebellion. All children are now expected to rebel against their parents at puberty. We live in an era of gonadotrophic rebellion! A boy plays ball with his Dad, reads his old comic books, and wants to be like him until puberty then all of a sudden like the twang of Axel Rose's guitar string the boy thinks his dad is just a dumb hippie who doesn't know where it's at. Who does know? *The companies with all of those new rebel products to sell.* I loved it last summer when they had the rebels running around in coveralls with one of the straps hanging down. That was almost as good a way to get at an anal Mom as having half your head shaved and the other half vegetable dyed a purplish pink.

To become a parent is to have a gigantic load of corporate crapola dumped in your lap the minute your kid hits puberty. It might surprise some of you young parents to know that 'twas not always thus. Was a time when kids grew up respecting their parents and tried to do something worthy of the respect of their communities.

So Rip Off Press, to return to my first paragraph, is dumping its underground image and going for a wider audience; well, I think this is likely to be a futile effort unless the company figures out a way to produce comic books that not only appeal to a readership but cost a lot less than they do now. My local store carries a couple of hundred titles on the shelves and thousands in the back issue bins and I don't see how anyone has the time or energy even to *look* at all of them. I suspect more people stand around and read them than buy them. A friend informed me that a comic book store on Haight Street in San Francisco was closing for this reason, more readers than buyers.

Gary Fields' **DOG COMIX** marches on. #6 is 50¢/stamp from Randy Paske, Gilbert, MN 55741-9631. Gary's first standard comic book came out late last year. **SUPERSWINE** from Caliber Press. Check your local store. I love the funny animal tradition in comics and am always happy to see young cartoonists carrying it on for a new generation.





FROM THE PANELS OF "CULTURAL JETLAG"...
CULTURE VULTURES
THEY'RE CUTE! THEY'RE CUDDLY! THEY PREY UPON THE CULTURALLY EFFETE!
PLEASE GIVE US A HOME!
FREE COMIC BOOKLET WITH EVERY PURCHASE!
LIMITED QUANTITY!
#10 A PAIR!
ORDER FROM: JIM SIERGEY 4135 N. HERMITAGE CHICAGO, IL. 60613

Dear Clay--

My baby sister keeps getting into my stash of Zap Comix and giving me the old shame on you finger for being a collector of rank porn. I've told her the Underground box is off limits and she should get back to her Barbies, but she persists in running up and down the front walk with ZAP 4 in her hand open to the Joe Blow story while she blows the little neck whistle Mom brought home from her local Women Against Violence Against Women rap group. It's not so bad that my sister is becoming an anti-sex feminist, because that's what's happening with her gender these days, right, but she keeps getting all my underground comix out of order and I have to sort the whole box every other day or so. What can I do to keep the little dweeb under control?

-Sexually harassed in Tuscon.

Dear S.H.I.T.,

You need a bag of Zaploc©™® Kidsisterproof Comic bags. These heavy-duty see through asbestos bags are guaranteed to keep even the cleverist little kid out of your private comix stash. Once you have put each comic in a Zaploc©™® bag and clipped the bag to a durable chain strung across the top of your room a couple of inches below the ceiling, you can sit back and relax, secure in the knowledge that no little kid will ever be able to get at your personal sex comix again!

Should the Zaploc©™® bag fail for some reason, you can always smack the little pest along side the head with it and your comix will be safe and sound. Until she gets out of intensive care, at least.

Dear Uncle Clay--

I've heard Underground comix called a sixties fad, something that came and went in a couple of years. Would you say this is an accurate comment?

--Darrell Martin

Dear Darrell--

Of course not. Underground comix are still being published in 1992. Would you call Marvel Comics a forties fad? A fad is something that was and isn't, like the hula hoop of the fifties. The major companies that published underground comix in the sixties and seventies are still around. They just don't do a lot of publicity. Krupp, Rip Off Press, and Last Gasp Comix are still there. You can write to them just as you can to Marvel or National.

Dear Clay--

Just about every week when I go to the comic store for my hit, I find two or three old tired out superheroes on the covers of Marvel and DC comics. These are usually Number One issues with the publishers' proclamation spread across the cover that they are Collectors' items. A few weeks later these comics are gone. Poof! Cancelled. Am I wrong to think there might be a conspiracy to loot the young collector's wallet here?

-Burned in Berkeley

Dear Uncle Clay,

Is it possible to have a complete collection of underground comix?

-Jack Burrows

Dear Jack,

No. There are a handful of underground collectors around and I have want lists from most of them which indicates that they do not have complete collections. I say No because underground comix were regional in nature, published all over the country, hey, all over the world; they were very big in England and Germany and Spain. Being regional many of the underground comix were never distributed outside the community. I have copies of books like FARK COMIX and FOLK FUNNIES because of my newsletter. People sent me copies of things from all over the world during the seventies, so I had these, but I rarely saw any of them in local stores. My collection is incomplete and I know of no complete one.

-Clay

Dear B. I. B.,

You sound like an observant Trekkie with your shields intact. Comic books are nothing but products to the big companies and the way to sell products is to promote them on prime time and sell the suckers. This is corporate America here, pal. Those Number One collectables have as much value as sugar coated cereals and plastic action figures. It's the brand name game. Would corporations cheat the customer? Of course. Anything to increase the bottom line. Today's comic reader gets less story and more ads than any other time in history. If you get story with no ads you pay dearly through increased cover prices. This technique has been used with all products. The bag of candy you get in the grocery store used to contain a pound, 16 ounces, so you paid so much for the pound. In 1991, the amount of candy in that bag went down to 14 ounces, but the bag appeared to be the same and the price was the same so most customers assumed they were getting the pound of candy they always got. The customer was never informed that the amount in the bag had gone down and was, quite simply, ripped off by the company. All perfectly legal, because the amount is printed in tiny type somewhere on the bag and all of us have nothing to do but read every label on every product we have grown to trust over the years.

Uncle Clay says yes, the corporations will cheat the consumer and yes, the comic book companies are cheating the younger comic buyer with manufactured collectors' items which are worthless the second the buyer walks out the door.

If it is rare, it is collectable. Wartime comics or Golden Age comics became valuable because most of the copies were recycled through paper drives and only a few remain extant in nice condition. None of the mass produced books of the past couple of decades have any real collector value. Collecting is now a business organized so that the major companies, their distributors, and the retail comic book stores make the profits.

Uncle Clay says if a comic book is proclaimed a collectors' item by the publisher, it isn't worth collecting. Learn to see hype for what it is.

And collect what you really like. Unless you intend to go into the comic book business, why bother collecting what everyone else is collecting? If you really want to make money with comics, you will have to seek out what is rare and compete with other hunters in order to get it and resell it. In the long run, collections of Undergrounds, Newaves, and Alternative comics will be unique and rare while collections of Marvel and DC and Disney comics will be common.